

## **Compatibility Determination**

**Uses:** Dog Sled Racing

**Supporting and Incidental Uses:** Snowmobiling, snowshoeing, firewood cutting, natural resource gathering, camping, cross-country skiing, skijoring, dog sledding, picnicking, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, videography, fixed-wing aircraft landings.

**Refuge Name:** Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

**Establishment and Acquisition Authority:** The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) established the 2.5-million-acre Selawik National Wildlife Refuge (Selawik refuge, refuge) as part of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuge System (Department of the Interior) on December 2, 1980.

**Selawik Refuge Purposes:** As stated in ANILCA Section 302 (7) (B), the purposes for which the Selawik refuge was established and shall be managed include:

- (i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, the Western Arctic caribou herd (including participation in coordinated ecological studies and management of these caribou), waterfowl, shorebirds and other migratory birds, and salmon and Sheefish;
- (ii) to fulfill international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;
- (iii) to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraphs (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents; and
- (iv) to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge.

The purpose of the congressionally designated Selawik Wilderness Area is to secure an enduring resource of wilderness, protect and preserve the wilderness character of the area as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS), and administer the area for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave it unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as designated wilderness.

### **National Wildlife Refuge System Mission**

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans (National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended [16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee]).

### **Description of Uses**

Dog sled races consist of individuals of all ages using teams of harnessed dogs to pull a sled along established winter trails, typically between villages. In the case of multi-day events, checkpoints and mandatory rest periods may occur in one or both of the villages within the

refuge's external boundary. Occasionally, weather or other conditions will require participants to camp in the refuge or use public shelter cabins. Snowmobiling and fixed-wing aircraft on skis are sometimes used to support participants and maintain trails; these have already been found compatible in other Selawik refuge compatibility determinations. The refuge has one annually permitted dog sled race, the historic Kobuk 440. Several other dog sled racing events, including those for youth and novice mushers, take place outside refuge boundaries and are associated with this race.

Dog sledding was found to be a supporting use for several other compatible activities, including subsistence, environmental education, and interpretation. While some visitors come to the refuge specifically to engage or observe in this activity from village checkpoints, many others follow the race through media coverage.

### **Availability of Resources**

Adequate refuge personnel and base operational funds are available to manage dog sledding and the Kobuk 440 activities at current and projected levels. Administrative staff time primarily involves phone conversations, written correspondence, and interaction with visitors at the office, providing information through commercial services on the refuge, or law enforcement contacts in the field.

In the case of the Kobuk 440 dog sled race, administration consists of the issuance of a special use permit and special conditions. Processing the permit takes less than one day; monitoring the impacts of the race is done incidental to other activities that involve the staff traveling by snowmobile between race checkpoints (villages). It's not anticipated that there will be requests for additional races; however, if there are, availability of resources and impacts to the refuge will be determined on a case-by-case basis and a special use permit will be required.

### **Anticipated Impacts of Uses**

Negligible impacts to habitats within the refuge from disturbance are anticipated. Possible localized adverse impacts to some wildlife species could occur in the form of short-term disturbance caused by supporting activities (snowmobiles and aircraft), but the proposed use would not have any long-term population-level impacts on refuge wildlife. The introduction of invasive plant species, perhaps from seeds carried on dog sleds or in bedding material for dogs, could affect refuge resources. Straw that contains no seeds is currently used at village checkpoints and would be required by permit condition in the future. To date, no invasive species introduction is known to have occurred on the Selawik refuge. Refuge staff will be vigilant to identify the possibility of potential introductions. Positive effects on the local economy, though small, are anticipated from these uses. Encouraging youth and local residents to engage in non-motorized outdoor activities and learn about the traditional practices and resource use of past generations is another positive and important impact.

Activities performed as part of dog sled racing already occur on the refuge. The trails used are already in use by regular refuge visitors; consequently, the additional use will have a negligible impact on the habitat. Regular refuge visitors using snowmobiles to travel between villages or to hunt or trap may have to exercise added caution due to the additional traffic on marked trails during these events. Such inconveniences are brief, and residents are accustomed to the trails being used by travelers with either snowmobiles or dog teams.

## **Public Review and Comment**

Public comments were solicited concurrently with the revision of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (USFWS 2010). Public comments on compatibility determinations were accepted during the public review period for the draft plan and announced in the Federal Register. The public comment period was October 21, 2010 to March 15, 2011, which provided 145 days for public review. We mailed the full draft plan and a summary to the individuals and organizations on our mailing list. We invited public comments through an advertisement in a local newspaper and attended city council meetings in Selawik and Noorvik to receive comments on the draft plan. Planning team members met with the Citizen's Advisory Commission on Federal Areas to discuss the issues at Selawik refuge and alternatives that were proposed in the draft plan. The draft compatibility determinations were posted on the Service's Region 7 Web page.

We received no comments on the draft of this compatibility determination. However, one individual asked that the Service explain what is considered "appropriate" and what is considered "compatible uses" in regards to dog sled racing. Overall, there was wide support for the use of public lands for competitive events such as snowmobile races and cultural events that establish a positive relationship between visitors or area residents and the refuge.

## **Refuge Determination (check one below)**

☐ Use is not compatible

X ☒ Use is compatible

## **Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility**

Visitors will be required to comply with any regulations in place such as seasonal closures for resource protection.

Permits are required for dog sled races. Liability insurance and bonding may be required, depending on the specific production activities proposed. Additionally, a \$100 fee may be required. News gathering organizations are exempt from fees, insurance, and bonding requirements but may be required to obtain a special use permit to ensure compatibility with refuge purposes, avoid conflict with established public use or research, or to protect refuge resources.

## **SPECIAL USE PERMIT STIPULATIONS FOR DOG SLED RACES AT SELAWIK REFUGE**

1. Failure to abide by any part of this special use permit; violation of any refuge related provision in Titles 43 (Part 36) or 50 (Sub-chapters B and C), Code of Federal Regulations (CFR); or violation of any pertinent State regulation (e.g., fish or game violation) will, with due process, be considered grounds for immediate revocation of this permit and could result in denial of future permit requests for lands administered by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This provision applies to all persons working under the authority of this permit (e.g., assistants, race monitors, volunteers, etc.). Appeals of decisions relative to permits are handled in accordance with Title 50 CFR 36.41.
2. The permit holder is responsible for ensuring that all employees, race participants, party members, contractors, aircraft pilots, and any other persons working for the permit holder and conducting activities allowed by this permit are: 1) familiar with and adhere to the

- conditions of this permit, and 2) possess at all times a signed copy of this permit while exercising these granted privileges.
3. This permit may be canceled or revised at any time by the refuge manager in case of emergency (e.g., unusual resource problems, high fire danger, flooding, etc.).
  4. The permit holder and permit holder's clients do not have the exclusive use of the site(s) or lands covered by this permit.
  5. Any problems with wildlife and/or animals taken in defense of life or property must be reported immediately to the refuge manager and Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and be salvaged in accordance with State regulations.
  6. Permit holders shall maintain their use areas in a neat and sanitary condition. Latrines must be located a minimum of 150 feet from springs, lakes, and streams to avoid contamination of water resources. All property must be removed from refuge lands upon completion or revocation of permitted activities, and permit holder will leave the surrounding grounds in a neat, clean, and orderly condition. If the permit holder fails to remove all property upon completion of authorized activities, he/she will be liable for the removal and restoration of the site.
  7. The construction of landing strips or pads is prohibited. Incidental hand removal of rocks and other minor obstructions may be permitted.
  8. The use of off-road vehicles is prohibited, except for snowmobiles, provided adequate snow cover is available to prevent scarring of the underlying vegetation.
  9. Any action by a permit holder or the permit holder's employees that unduly interferes with or harasses other refuge visitors or impedes access to any site is strictly prohibited.
  10. Construction of tent platforms and cabins or other permanent structures is prohibited.
  11. Fuel caches are prohibited.
  12. The operation of aircraft at altitudes and in flight paths resulting in the herding, harassment, hazing, or driving of wildlife is prohibited. It is recommended that all aircraft, except for takeoff and landing, maintain a minimum altitude of 2,000 feet above ground level.
  13. The use of helicopters is prohibited.
  14. Race participants and assistants must use seedless straw bedding for dogs.

### **Justification**

Long distance dog sled racing is a long standing tradition unique to the State of Alaska and has strong public support among the communities in the region. Dog sledding and associated racing activity inspires visitors to learn more about wildlife habitat, subsistence, and resource issues. By promoting activities that encourage visitors to participate in outdoor activities such as dog sledding, we foster wildlife and wildland stewardship. We also showcase a traditional subsistence practice that allowed communities to harvest and share resources.

The Kobuk 440, which crosses relatively small portions of Selawik refuge, is one of the few races long enough to be a qualifying race for Alaska's Iditarod dog sled race. It is difficult for a race to cover such length safely in the region and not cross public lands. Of the 440-mile race, 98 miles is on refuge land with the majority of the race taking place on Native and State lands. This race replaced more informal races held between villages along the same route prior to the establishment of the Selawik refuge.

The current and projected amount of these activities has been found to have insignificant, adverse physical and biological effects in the draft refuge comprehensive conservation plan. After fully considering the impacts of these activities, as described previously in the "Anticipated Impacts of the Uses" section of this document, it is my determination that dog sled racing within the refuge does not materially interfere with or detract from the purposes of the refuge or mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

### Supporting Documents

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1987. Selawik National Wildlife Refuge Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Wilderness Review and Environmental Impact Statement. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska. 378 pp.


U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1987. Record of Decision: Selawik National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Environmental Impact Statement, Wilderness Review, and Wild River Plan. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska. 15 pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2010. Draft Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment. Selawik National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, AK. 285 pp (plus ten appendices).

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2011. Final Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Selawik National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, AK.

### Refuge Determination

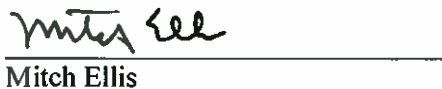
Refuge Manager/  
Project Leader Approval:

  
Lee Anne Ayres

14 July 2011  
Date

### Concurrence

Regional Chief  
National Wildlife  
Refuge System:

  
Mitch Ellis

7-20-2011  
Date

**Mandatory 10-Year Re-evaluation Date: 2021**

### NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use Decision

☐ Categorical Exclusion without Environmental Action Memorandum  
☐ Categorical Exclusion and Environmental Action Memorandum  
☒ Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact  
☐ Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

